DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 171 180 HE 011 143

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TITLE True Confessions of a Pre-Law Advisor.
PUB DATE Jun 78
NOTE 15p.; Speech presented at the Northeast Association of Pre-Law Advisers arrual conference (June 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Admission Criteria; *College Choice; *Educational Counseling; *Faculty Advisors; Higher Education; *Law Schools; Student Needs
IDENTIFIERS College Applicants; Cornell University NY; Law Students; *Selective Admission

ABSTRACT

Perspectives of a law school advisor on the advising role as seen by the student and the law school and issues that are relevant to student needs are presented. Questions that students frequently ask the law school advisor and the legitimacy of the advisor as a screener in getting students accepted into law schools are discussed. Concern over the qualifications of applicants, including the quality of their educational experiences as well as their Law School Admission Test scores and grade point averages is addressed. Some of the pressures on the law school advisor and the need for well informed visitors to campuses from the law schools are noted. The need for timeliness in responding to student applications, the role of the NAPLA, and factors used in admission decisions at Cornell University are also covered. (SW)

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"TRUE CONFESSIONS OF A PRE-LAW ADVISOR" *

My first confession has nothing to do with being a pre-law advisor. I have years and years behind me as a convention/annual meeting attendee and I long ago came to the conclusion that the most thankless role one can be asked to play is that of banquet speaker! In fact I often vote against scheduling one if I'm on a program committee. So, you may well wonder why I'm standing up here at this moment! Well, let's count it as 50% due to affection for the group of young people who are Officers and Executive Committee members of this organization, with whom I've had the privilege and fun of working in the past. The other 50% is due to the fact that it seemed to me there were some things I wanted to say about being a pre-law advisor on an occasion when some law school representatives would be listening as well as some of my fellow advisors.

So - I accepted the invitation to speak, promising myself that I would remember that the recipe for an after dinner speech, especially if preceded by alcohol, should include plenty of shortening.

I also remembered reading somewhere that the reason there are so few good talkers in public is that there are so few thinkers in private. I decided to supplement my own thinking and solicited ideas - "confessions" if you will - from a number of colleagues at other colleges. I am grateful, and herewith give credit to Rudite Robinson of Wesleyan, Doug Chaffey of Chatham, Pat Meany of Wellesley, Susan Haupt of MIT, Stan Shuman of Bryant College, and David Culling of Cornell (a former member of NAPLA and its Executive Board and still a good friend) who responded. I trust they will forgive me if having cited them in my bibliography, I don't include footnotes in my remarks. That would not only be tedious but impossible since there was - not surprisingly perhaps - a good deal of agreement on our concerns.

*Speech given by Drue Matthews, Director, Career Services, Mount Holyoke College at Banquet of Annual Conference of Northeast Association of Pre-Law Advisers, June, 1978.

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I remembered another bit of advice, too. I believe it is an old Chinese proverb that runs: "One picture is worth ten thousand words." So I did a little happy research in several books and have made a small collection of cartoons which, when slightly edited, illuminate in one way of another some of the pre-law advising/law school admission situations and dilemmas. I shall start with a couple and save the rest till the end trusting that anticipation will keep you alert through my more serious comments.

The first two pictures are from the Scribner's book: Good News. Bad News, a collection of cartoons by Henry Martin depicting the world of the corporate businessman (many of which first appeared in the New Yorker).

1. & 1A. The Pre-Law Advisors Year begins with NAPLA. Can October LSAT's be upon us?

2. The Pre-law Advisors Role: As seen by the student; as seen by the pre-law advisor.

The Role of the Pre-Law Advisor

As seen by the student:

The pre-law advisor has all the answers and is there to get students in! The first question usually is not, "Where do you suggest I apply?" but "Where can I get in?" and more often than not these questions are asked by a senior who has signed up for an interview before college has opened - and no LSAT has yet been taken! Later in the year the questions are: "Should I sign a waiver on my recommendations?", "Should I retake the exam?". Still later: "Why haven't I heard?", "What does being on "hold" mean?".

As seen by the law school:

Unhappily some law school admission people view the advisor as a pre-screener of candidates, forgetting or perhaps not realizing that most, if not all of us,

are counselors first and advisors second and "screeners" not at all and we cannot jeopardize or betray the trust that being a counselor imposes. Sometimes we see students with their hair down, at their most vulnerable and uncertain. Would any of us be here today if we had been betrayed by those in whom we have confided in our low moments, our times of aberration?

The pre-law advisor may question; may challenge a student's reason for going to law school; the choice of schools to which applications are being sent; may inquire whether he or she is aware of the crunch in job hunting at the other end, and generally inject knowledge and reason into the pre-law process. For example, it does bring one up short when faced with the statistic that the number of lawyers in Massachusetts has increased from 9,000 to 18,000 in 5 years.

The advisor may/should strongly suggest to pre-law students that they seek out experiences that will allow them to explore the law. This necessitates developing means of reaching potential pre-law candidates early in their college years. Although the importance of this is perhaps obvious to all let me cite a case of a junior political science major who wanted to go into the law to help with kids who get into trouble with the law. She developed a four-week career exploration experience, for our January Term, in a juvenile court. At the end of that period she had become completely turned off by the role played by the lawyers in the cases she observed. She found that where she wanted to be was in the counseling advocacy more long-term role of the social worker. Other students find reinforcement for their ambitions - and, I am sure, write more convincing personal statements when they get to the application process.

What disturbs me and some other pre-law advisors I've discovered, is that some pre-law advisors and pre-law committees themselves adopt a "screening" role; they are more concerned with their record - and their institution's record - of getting graduates accepted into law schools, especially the top schools.

They put themselves squarely on the law school admissions side of the equation by telling the pre-law candidate where he/she may apply with the blessing/recommendation of the advisor/committee. This is why a number of us in the colleges refuse to rank and sort and go along with "committee recommendation" law schools seem to prefer. Some of us believe an individual has a right to ignore advice and conventional wisdom about LSAT/GPA cutoffs, a right to fail as well as to succeed. Indeed, some individuals need to fail in order to come to terms with reality. And I wonder, often, at the success record in law school admissions - the percent accepted - cited by some undergraduate colleges in their admissions come on! What is the percentage based on - <u>all</u> the students who did apply? or is it a percentage of those who followed orders? In the cut-throat competition for students in which we are beginning to find ourselves, high school juniors and seniors (and their parents) are now shopping for colleges which will seem to guarantee admission to law school (or medical school)!

As a matter of fact, I do believe that the law schools take many things into account as well as the LSAT score and the GPA, and another role of the pre-law advisor, if we can get to students early enough, is to encourage them not only <u>not</u> to "throw away" their academic opportunities but also to feel it is going to aid, not hinder, their candidacy if they seek out a wide range of experiences, or make a commitment to some activity about which they care deeply, and to try to convince some of them that it is <u>quality</u> of such experiences, rather than quantity, that should matter. It is hard to convince students that the LSAT/GPA is not ALL! I wish the law schools could help more on this. More of this later.

Now I'd like to share some thoughts about the role that law school people - those with whom we have contact in the admission process, whether faculty or administrators - can/should play in the pre-law picture.

In the first place I'll have to confess that I do not know as much about individual law schools as I need to know - or wish I did know. It is an exceptional pre-law advisor who does! Those faculty members who are law school graduates or belong to organizations or do research that brings them in touch with law school people have an advantage although they need to watch themselves lest they betray a certain institutional chauvinism and prejudice in relation to schools with which they are not familiar. The reason: most faculty members who have been tapped to be pre-law advisors have full teaching loads - those with released time and a minority, unless my NAPLA contacts have been very lop-sided! Most of us who are in college administration, especially in career counseling, are likely to be working with students interested in fields from Art to Zoology and everything in between. We have full interview schedules of our own (indeed we often do our correspondence and read our mail at night and on weekends). So it is not all that easy to spend enough time with law school visitors to campus, especially if we have four or five recruiters there on the same day and no one is staying for lunch - they are all off to the next college.

There is real dilemma here because I am well aware that the law school visitors have jobs back home, too, and must cover as much ground as possible in the time they are away (for reasons of money as well as time). It adds to the frustration, however, when the law school visitor is not well informed. On occasion all of us have had faculty members come who were not on the Admission Committee but merely happened to have a son or daughter in the neighborhood, or a meeting to attend. Law students as recruiters are sometimes excellent but

more often as informal supplements to an admissions officer or faculty member rather than as the recruiter.

In a small but insistent voice may I ask, for all of us, for more lead time before a visit is scheduled? We do not have instant communication with students on our campuses! They are scattered for living/studying/class in twenty to a hundred buildings with no p.a. system, with an imperfect mail system!

What students and pre-law advisors need is more information about law schools that will give them character and help differentiate them from each other. The Pre-Law Handbook is great, so far as it goes, especially since most law schools now include a graph showing number of candidates applying and accepted with various combinations of LSAT and GPA. What might be helpful would be tabulations of law schools similar to those already included showing "key facts about ABA-approved law schools" which would add specifics about combined degree programs (I get this, now from the GMAT Handbook), special areas or strength such as environmental law, family law, etc. (I can hear you say: we all have these courses but you know that some places have more options in these areas than others!)

Some of the most helpful experiences for me have been special visits to law schools, arranged especially for pre-law advisors, during which time we met faculty members, sat in on a class, and met students, heard from the placement officer and generally absorbed a bit of the atmosphere of the place. There is always the problem of funds for the travel as well as time away from campus but if the invitation comes a month or two ahead of time it is often possible to plan dual use for both the travel expense and time away from campus. My own image of two law schools has been completely changed by such experiences - and conversation with law students was, in fact, one of the most telling factors.

I believe some of the most trying problems all of us at the feeder schools are currently facing are caused by the lack of response from law schools once the applications are completed! Rolling admissions are great for those on the top of the heap who get early decision from the law schools who are at the top of their lists. But consider the middle of the road student who completed all applications in December and has had not a line from a law school by March, or April, or May! Or, more likely, has been accepted by a school or two at the bottom of his/her list and is in a void as far as the other law schools are concerned.

Do you suppose they have lost my application? Do you suppose they didn't receive everything - or have misfiled something? Did they mail something to me that got lost in the mail? When can I expect to hear? We are besieged by such questions - and an inquiry sent by mail to check on status is also subject to getting lost, a student realizes, so the telephone is used. I don't know how law school admissions staffs feel about all these inquiries but you would get three times as many if it were not for the cost of long distance calls - most students are already broke from application and LSDAS fees and most of us do not have telephone budgets which make it possible for us to handle all the calls that should be made!

Let me quickly say that most of us advisors understand the problems created by multiple applications, by applicants "trading up", on their personal priority lists, etc. I spend hours, literally, trying to help anxious students comprehend the situation, rationalizing, if not defending, law school behavior. I am getting weary of it.

This is something I think the Law School Admission Council should put its collective mind to: working out some agreement as to certain dates on which <u>all</u> applicants would receive some kind of reading on their status - whether rejected, waiting list, hold (and <u>please</u> define that). It is the <u>uncertainty</u>, the <u>silence</u>, the <u>void</u> that is so demoralizing!

I suppose you are all aware that there continue to be problems regarding deposits for places on waiting lists, etc., but I do not want to flog that one tonight.

The increasing cost of law school applications is also an increasing worry to many of us. Another dilemma here - since our own undergraduate admissions fees are going up too. Do you realize, however, that our Financial Aid Offices are being asked to underwrite the application fees of many students who the law schools are anxious to have.

Another bit of conventional wisdom for speakers is that, when you are half through your speech, you should sit down. Well, I won't do that exactly but I do want to touch quickly on the role that NAPLA has in the law school admission process and, perhaps, a suggestion for the future. Then I'll close with a bit of fantasy.

It seems to me that the most critical role NAPLA has played in its few short years has been as a meeting place where pre-law advisors could communicate with and learn from each other but, equally important, where they could communicate with law school people in a more or less informal way. I like to think that this communication effected some changes for the better. Certainly the inclusion of the sample test in the LSAT bulletin eliminates the problem that existed when detailed information about the test was received at about the same time the admission ticket was received - sometimes less than a week before the critical date. I suspect that the heavy concern of pre-law advisors with the various "prep courses" for the LSAT may have encouraged, even if it may not have initiated, the development of this excellent material explaining aspects of the examination. Some of us remember when most of the information about the LSAT was contained in <u>The Pre-Law Handbook</u> which was seldom available more than a few days before the October exam, if indeed it was not <u>afterwards</u>.

Where are we now with NAPLA? We are at that difficult point in any mature professional organization when we must face the fact that we still have - and will always have, I hope - new members who have special needs, for whom just "getting together" is exhilarating. And I include in "new members" not only pre-law advisors, but also new people from the law schools in the associate membership.

We also have a large core of "old" members who are likely to approach meetings with a feeling, "I have heard all this before." It is not easy to plan programs for such a diverse group. Fortunately, I guess, there are always new aspects of law study, of law placement, to investigate. There are new alternatives to the study of law with which we need to be familiar in order to acquaint our students with these alternatives. And, human affairs being what they are, there will continue to be problems on both sides of the law school admission process which need to be looked at jointly by feeder schools and law schools. Here the experienced pre-law advisors can make a particular contribution, if they will. We all must remember that we will get something out of NAPLA, as out of any organization, only as we put something <u>in</u>.

It does seem to me, however, that NAPLA could serve also as the publisher/distributor of some of the aids that students and pre-law advisors need.

For example, a number of years ago Williams College sent out a questionnaire to law schools that got information lacking elsewhere, including information on joint degree programs, compiled it for the use of its own students, but allowed it to be distributed (for a small fee, $1.00 as I recall) to interested NAPLA members.

A few years ago, also, someone at the University of Rochester put together a "Law School Locater" which they generously shared with some of the rest of us who heard about it. This was of enormous help in consolidating the LSAT/GPA data from law schools, creating groupings that were of great assistance in

"getting the picture" - in identifying schools who were within roughly the same range of competition. Many unfamiliar schools got attention this way.

David Cullings has shared with me a current Cornell effort which is excellent in its coverage of a range of factors in admission:

1. Data on relative weights - if any - given to LSAT & GPA; cutoff points - if any; median LSAT, GPA.
2. Information concerning number of applications, number accepted, number wait listed, number accepted from waiting list.
3. Use of/importance of recommendations; whether waivers should be signed or not.
4. Relative weight put on subjective factors such as:

   extra curricular activities

   work experience

   recommendations

   essay

   quality of undergraduate school

   age

   sex

   minority or disadvantaged status

Of course each of us - if we had staff time - could do this sort of survey. How would the law schools react if each feeder school sent out such a survey? It would be chaos and even the Rochesters and Cornells might find their questionnaires destroyed in the shuffle. Could NAPLA undertake to publish/distribute the results of such a questionnaire?

There are problems. NAPLA has no "capital" to invest in the research or printing. Some additional questions could be incorporated in the Pre-Law Handbook

as I've already suggested. However, most of the material I've just outlined would be more appropriately handled on the feeder college side. Could a university such as Cornell or Rochester, with graduate student, and/or work study students and perhaps some computer time, do the same survey, delete those parts that directly relate to the experience of their own graduates and turn the rest over to NAPLA? Could those of us who would benefit put in prepaid orders to cover cost of printing or mailing? Or have it ready for distribution in June at Annual Meeting time? Would the LSAC make a gift to NAPLA to underwrite the enterprise? Because a lot of us are going to try to get into this questionniare game if we can!

Well, as I wind this up I want to resort to the 'pictures are worth 10,000 words" bit for a few more smiles at our own expense. Most of these cartoons are Droodles, taken from a couple of little books by that name, done by Roger Price. The final one, as you will recognize, is taken from Good News. Bad News.

A last word I must have. I told you I would fantacize a bit. All of us - on both sides of the fence - deplore the dependence on LSAT/GPA. I dream of some sort of x-ray machine or electronic sensor that would

a. measure motivation

b. measure readiness

c. measure how well, how ethically, an individual will use the law in the future.

I must admit I'm sure this will remain a fantasy - human beings are too complex and too constantly in a state of changing and developing to be measurable. But I do want to share, in closing, a paragraph from Scott Turow's One L - which you will either have read already - or must!

for reform, for the opportunity to be evaluated through papers as well as tests, or by way of more frequent and less charged examinations, has been heard for years, and has in large part been rebuffed. Some faculty members frankly admit that they prefer not to spend the additional time that the alternative systems would require. Students sometimes suspect there are other reasons for the faculty's resistance to change. The professors are persons who did quite well on exams; in fact, they all owe much of their present position to that success. It is difficult at moments not to see them as merely perpetuating the regime on which they base their sense of authority and self-esteem.

Tom Blaustein offered a limited defense of exams when I told him how angered I had been by the whole process. He admitted that he preferred to get papers from his students and that traditional law exams hardly measured the full range of qualities important in a good attorney.

"But over the long haul," Tom said, "they do give you some reading on the way your mind works in certain situations—one skill. And if you're making a career choice—or if someone is making decisions about you—it's better to know that than nothing at all."

Maybe. Even conceding Tom's point, I'm still not sure that that one quality should be allowed to determine so much of who gets what jobs, who teaches, who clerks, who gets the Law Review's training in legal scholarship. But the truth is that exams have so dominated my year as a law student that I have no objectivity about them. We'll all end up as lawyers anyway, entering a world of fine opportunities, and in the end I've tried to write off exams as a quaint professional custom, another rite of passage for the novice.

But one thing nags which does not bear directly on me anymore, but is worth mention. Right now admissions at most American law schools are based on predictions of how well

applicants will do in school, which is to say how high they will rank on exams. Those forecasts, based on statistical formulae that combine LSAT scores and college grades, are often quite accurate. But that amounts only to saying that American law schools admit people who will be good test-takers rather than good attorneys. Correlations between exam success and worthwhile achievements in the practice of law are speculative at best. Until that connection is better established, the narrow and arbitrary nature of exams will continue to dictate a narrow and arbitrary means of selection for training for the bar. And that is a peculiar state of affairs for a profession and an education which claim to concern themselves with rationality, with fairness.